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FYI –

Irasburg Wind Opponents Start Petition Drive
IRA To Recruit Volunteers Wednesday Night

By Jennifer Hersey ClevelandStaff Writer

IRASBURG -- The effort to oppose the construction of two industrial wind turbines on Kidder Hill will begin a petition drive to ask the select board to hold a special town meeting on the contentious issue.

The opposition also now has a name -- Irasburg Ridgeline Alliance -- whose acronym, IRA, serves also as an homage to the town's founder, Ira Allen.

The group kicks off its neighbor-to-neighbor campaign tonight at 6:30 at the town hall, where it will seek volunteers to help with the petition drive.

The goal is to gauge the feelings of Irasburg residents regarding the turbines, said organizer Judith Jackson. IRA's organizers believe the majority of the town opposes the project, but want to make sure all voices are heard, Jackson said.

The project, two nearly 500-foot-tall towers in close proximity to several houses, was proposed by well-known energy developer David Blittersdorf. Blittersdorf has not given the select board formal notice of his plans yet in the form of an application to the state's Public Service Board (PSB).

Blittersdorf's intentions came out during an informal discussion at a select board meeting a month ago, and the opposition kicked into high gear right off the bat.

"We were pretty much taken by surprise," Jackson said. "Everyone was pretty much taken aback."

In their effort to learn more about how to stop the project before it starts, Jackson said opponents reached out to legislators. They learned that a unified response from the majority of townspeople was the way to go, she said.

"Your best bet is to make that really clear," Jackson said of the legislators' advice.

This weekend, about 25-30 volunteers constructed six large signs voicing their opposition and placed them in various places in town.

The petition will ask the select board to formally oppose the project, to hold a nonbinding referendum-type vote on whether the people of Irasburg want a wind project in town, and to develop a town plan that protects Irasburg's ridgelines, Jackson said.

The opponents are not positive the vote will turn out in their favor, but their sense is that the majority of townspeople oppose the project, Jackson said.

Jackson raised a comment that Gov. Peter Shumlin made regarding the siting of energy projects.

During a Vermont Public Television appearance Shumlin said, "I have always said and I will always say: I believe that no energy project should be built in a town in Vermont when the residents of that community don't vote affirmatively to host it."

"We're going to take state government at its word," Jackson said.

Residents' concerns run the gamut -- from potential illness due to proximity to towers to the noise generated by blades, from the aesthetic issue to the assertion that wind power is unreliable -- which they voiced very clearly during the first select board meeting after townspeople learned about the proposed project.

Regardless of individual beliefs, Jackson said, "Pretty much everyone agrees that when it comes to issues that affect the nature and the future of the town, we should have the freedom to make responsible decisions for ourselves."

Anyone who is interested -- whether they live in Irasburg or not -- is invited to attend the meeting tonight.

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